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22 November 1966

Soviet Internal

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1. [REDACTED] remarked to us recently about the perceptible decline in political humor since the Khrushchev ouster. Gone is a character whose appearance, conduct and policies seemed to beg the satirist's attention. In his place is a team more inclined to operate with their collective feet on the ground and their shoes on their feet.

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2. Despite the inherent problems of decision making by consensus, the present leadership has not been ineffective in dealing with the vast problems of managing a complex and highly structured society in a complex and increasingly unstructured communist world. It has altered fundamentally the Khrushchevian approach in many policy areas and in some cases--partly because of good judgment and partly because of good fortune--the results must surely have been gratifying. With the 1966 harvest the best in Soviet history, at least as far as major crops are concerned, agricultural policy has been the most widely acclaimed success.

3. In the broad areas of economic growth and international relations, the leadership can present only a modest picture of achievement. Timorous steps have been taken over the last year to introduce some aspects of a market economy into a few carefully selected industries. Although these industries have grown at a somewhat faster rate than in previous years, only longer term and broader application of these economic levers offers the prospect of a higher sustained growth rate. The present leadership has also shown itself more adroit in dealing with China and it has markedly strengthened the Soviet position vis-a-vis China in the world communist movement, ^{although} ~~not~~ without substantial help from the Chinese themselves. It has not, however, been able to reconstruct the kind of unity that once existed among the other communist parties and states.

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4. Granted these limited successes, the Soviet leadership has come nowhere near answering most of the great questions facing it. It has not resolved the countless and deepseated problems of resource allocation that would be handled by the market in a free economy. There are indications that, although the economic plan for 1966-70 is scheduled for formal approval by the Supreme Soviet at its mid-December meeting, there are still matters of resource allocation that are unresolved at the Politburo level. The Soviet Communist party -- entrenched and jealous of its very real perquisites -- suffers from declining relevance in a society whose prosperity increasingly linked to the technical soundness, rather than the ideological probity, of state policy. Finally, the USSR is all but powerless to check the growing preoccupation of other communist states with their own national well-being as they themselves perceive it.

5. In striving to deal with these and other problems, the present leadership has exerted considerable effort to give the appearance of collective decision making. At least as far as major policy initiatives are concerned, the appearance is probably very close to the reality. In fact, the present Politburo seems to have evolved a fairly formal mechanism for decision making and a fairly rigid code of individual behavior designed to insure collectivity.

6. The emphasis on collectivity cannot, of course, erase the very real differences of personality, outlook and interest that exist among those at the political pinnacle. There is persuasive evidence not only that these differences exist, but that they can be and are voiced. Political wisdom may dictate circumspection in any individual's advocacy of a policy, but it is from the inter-play of different views that the consensus policy ultimately emerges.

7. The apparent stability of the Soviet leadership over the past two years rests on this general acceptance-- either by choice or by necessity--of certain broad rules of the collective game. The subtle shifts of individual standing go on, however, and the question of whether or not some individual has transgressed the rules of the game produces a constant tension. Among the more notable shifts

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within the collective has been the slow but steady enlargement of the position of Brezhnev who now readily assumes the most prominent place in all public demonstrations of precedence. He now seems to have the most important word--probably the last word--in the key area of appointments.

8. The fortunes of two other prominent Politburo members, Nikolay Podgorny and Aleksandr Shelepin, have also shifted. Podgorny was kicked upstairs from his post as number two man in the party to the largely honorary position of USSR President a year ago. Shelepin who enjoyed a wide variety of important responsibilities in the immediate post-Khrushchev period has seen those responsibilities circumscribed. Both men retain their positions on the Politburo, however, and both are therefore still very much at the center of Soviet power.

9. The relationship between Brezhnev and Kosygin typifies the strengths and weaknesses of the current leadership. The fact that the relationship has stood up for more than two years represents no small achievement but the extensive overlap of party and government institutions and interests inevitably produces strain. How much strain the present arrangement can take and still preserve its collective nature--or even a facade of collectivity--probably can not be known until the system is put to the test of a major internal or external setback.

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